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Module: Investigating Research

Critical Review: Banegas D., Pavese, A., Velazquez, A. & Vlez,
S.M. (2013)

Word Count: 1472

DIM13120809



Introduction:

This collaborative action research (CAR), conducted by Banegas et al. examines the participants' teaching practices in accordance with their personal motivation and their students' learning opportunities. The approach taken by the authors (all of them being English-as-a-foreign-language / EFL teachers in an Argentinian secondary school) provides the opportunity to examine and challenge their teaching practices in order to enhance students' motivation for learning.

Specific particularities of this paper derive from the fact that, as claimed explicitly in the abstract, the intended readership would be other teachers and/or teacher-researchers inspired and encouraged to use collaborative action research in their own practices. Even though it is claimed that action research is focused more on processes than outcomes (Adelman, 1993), the rationale of this report is to explore the teachers' opportunity for professional development through involvement in CAR projects and the effects on their pupils' learning (2013, p. 186). In order to do so, the authors are adopting a largely descriptive way of presenting their research, focusing mainly on their findings (the evaluating stages).

This review aims to assess the main issues that are raised from this report and the use of the specific theoretical and methodological approach adopted from the participants along with the evidences provided. Taking into account the above particularity, a detailed analysis of the general aims of the collaborative action research is not appropriate.

Theoretical and Methodological background:

The authors begin by presenting the theoretical background of their pedagogical approach. The fact that they are all using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which promotes cognitive engagement, language learning and motivation (2013, p. 186), combined with their already established collaboration and personal relation for a long period of time, facilitated the use of CAR for investigating their teaching practices. Since both approaches are considered innovative and highly reflective, the project was named CAR-CLIL.

Burns (2010) adopts a postmodernist approach to action research, where the main aim is to explore one's own teaching contexts. By identifying a problematic situation and reflecting systematically on it, action research constitutes a means of empowering teachers to examine and implement interventions in their practice in order to ameliorate it. This approach, mainly adopted by Banegas et al. appears largely suited to the research purposes, but is, however, still highly debatable in the circles of action research theorists. McTaggart (2006) refers to versions of action research that have lost their way and Kemmis (2006) questions the critical, transformative approach of various current projects. Specifically the latter provides examples of inadequate action research that could apply for this paper, such as "Action research aimed at improving the efficiency of practices rather than their efficacy and effectiveness evaluated in terms of social, cultural, discursive and material-economic historical consequences of practices" (Kemmis 2006, p. 460).

In a similar way, Carr and Kemmis (2005) challenge their own perception of emancipatory action research in the current practice but remain persistent in their main question, namely “whose interests are in fact likely to be served by the study” (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p. 217). In the CAR-CLIL project, the answer to this question is not obvious.

Although the teachers/researchers are interested in their students’ feedback and reflect on it, we can assume that the article by Banegas et al. adopts a simplistic analysis of the issue in question since they link their findings and positive outcomes mostly with the factor of teachers’ motivation and autonomy in relation with pupils’ motivation. At the same time, other important aspects of teaching and classroom dynamics that enhance learning, such as democratization of education, alternative pedagogical approaches of teaching or students’ choice on learning (see for example Cook-Sather, 2002) are neglected. Moreover, the ways their practice has changed are not explained explicitly in the article, prioritizing the shift on perception.

Research Design:

It is challenging to examine the research design and processes, since the authors provide limited information. As already mentioned above, the presentation of this CAR project is mainly descriptive with a narrow focus on content instead of procedures. Still, the major element of distinguishing collaborative action research from everyday reflective practice is that the former presupposes systematic data collection and analysis (Burns, 2010).

The participants maintained the main form of an action research project by following a cyclical process, consisting of three cycles. Each cycle contained facets of Action (design of the proposed intervention), Intervention (implementation of the programme) and Evaluation, whereas the first cycle included also Issue Identification and Initial Investigations (2013, p. 188, figure 1). Many researchers would agree that the most challenging part of conducting action research is the preliminaries (for example Adelman 1993), but there is no particular reference to it. In general, the approach adopted complies with the most common action research structure where it is seen as a spiral procedure, potentially never ending as more issues come to light.

The authors claim to have been using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, whereas no evidence of this claim is present in the report. Hence, it is difficult to establish exactly what they did, since the provided information is insufficient.

Considering the nature of action research as “projects in which practitioners seek to effect transformations in their own practices” (Dowling & Brown, 2010, p. 158), the research sample is always their students. Besides, since CAR projects are seen as “small-scale, contextualized and local in character” (Burns, 2010, p. 10), the participation of 90 students from 3 different classes in this project is considered sufficient.

Regarding data collection and analysis, the information provided is more enlightening. Action Research is commonly using a variety of collection and analysis methods, shared with other research methodologies. Due to this practice, recorded meetings, interviews, classroom observations and post-observation interviews, field notes and student questionnaires were used for collecting data, whereas transcription, inductive coding, attention to common patterns, elaboration of thematic categories and networks were the analysis tools.

The variety of data collection and analysis strategies could be considered as adding validity to the research findings, since different quality and depth of information is collected from each of them, before and after the intervention facet. Moreover, data from teachers are triangulated with those collected from the students, and this is another important aspect of research reliability. Again, the presentation of the data collection and analysis strategies is problematic since neither the content nor any other details are given.

A recent research concerning the ethical issues in school-based action research revealed mainly the lack of a coherent perception (Brindley & Bowker, 2013). Most revealing was the fact that most schools rely either on the institutions'-researchers' ethics (example BERA) or on the legislation (such as Data protection Act). In parallel, Elliot defines action research as "an ethical inquiry" (Elliot 2007, p. 231). Written permissions from both students and parents are mentioned in this paper, but no further discussion is made.

Discussions:

Even though action research doesn't necessarily entail generalization of its findings, Elliot in his effort to set criteria for action research assessment mentions that «[action research] enables a teacher to generate a description of the complexities of the case in sufficient detail to be of universal significance to other teachers» (Elliot 2007, p. 239). The teachers of this CAR-CLIL project recognise the restrictions of generalizing their findings, but at the same time their report reveals their interest in having an effect on the current educational research field and in changing their curriculum at institutional level.

Despite the lack of methodological information provided by the authors in this paper, it is considered successful in terms of achieving its main goal, namely inspire and encourage other practitioners to take up CAR projects. The analysis of the evaluating facets, the focus primarily on the advantages of collaboration amongst practitioners and following on the teachers' perception of their professional development are considered highly beneficial for

attracting other teachers' attention. If we adopt the Stake and Schwandt views of quality in action research as *quality-as-experience* and *quality-as-measured* (cited on Elliot, 2007, p. 230), this CAR-CLIL project refers mainly to the former.

Though the focus of this paper is on teachers' motivation and development, the group commitment in the project, the trust among the participants, the group discussions and the constant reflections appear to be the most beneficial aspects of the entire process. Still, some of the crucial dangers that derive from a similar attempt are aptly listed at the authors' conclusion.

Finally, the CAR-CLIL findings could have wider implications for development of policies if the participants alongside with examining their teaching strategies, were also explicitly interested in examining their educational aims (Elliot 2007, Carr & Kemmis 1986, McTaggart 2006, Van Lier 1994, to mention some of the advocates). Their realization of being passive consumers of marketed course books" (p. 196) and their will to change it, is definitely an extra message with broader interest for other practitioners and policy-makers.

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